



County of Los Angeles CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICE

713 KENNETH HAHN HALL OF ADMINISTRATION
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90012
(213) 974-1101
<http://ceo.lacounty.gov>

WILLIAM T FUJIOKA
Chief Executive Officer

February 8, 2008

To: Supervisor Yvonne B. Burke, Chair
Supervisor Gloria Molina
Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky
Supervisor Don Knabe
Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich

From: William T Fujioka
Chief Executive Officer

Marcia Mayeda
Director of Animal Care and Control

Board of Supervisors
GLORIA MOLINA
First District

YVONNE B. BURKE
Second District

ZEV YAROSLAVSKY
Third District

DON KNABE
Fourth District

MICHAEL D. ANTONOVICH
Fifth District

REPORT OF REVIEW OF CARSON ANIMAL SHELTER (ITEM NO. 37, AGENDA OF FEBRUARY 12, 2008)

In response to Supervisor Burke's motion adopted by your Board on December 18, 2007, this report provides your Board with the results of the investigation into the death of a dog at the Los Angeles County animal shelter located in Carson last December; a corrective action plan to address personnel and infrastructure issues that may have contributed; and a plan to address all necessary facility improvements at this shelter.

BACKGROUND AND CHRONOLOGY ON ZEPHYR

- On October 27, 2007, a stray female dog known as "Zephyr" arrived at the Carson Animal Shelter.
- On November 2, 2007, a Department volunteer put a "hold" on Zephyr. A "hold" means that the volunteer accepts responsibility for finding a home or placement for the animal and requests that it not be euthanized. It is expected that animals placed on "hold" will be moved quickly out of the shelters, so that the shelters do not become overcrowded resulting in animals becoming stressed and exposed to illness.
- On November 5, 2007, Zephyr became ill with an upper respiratory infection; treatment was initiated. She responded to treatment and became well. Subsequently, Zephyr became ill again and a second course of treatment was begun. This coincided with a temporary veterinary medical staffing shortage at the Carson Animal Shelter. Due to the staffing shortage Zephyr missed a couple doses of antibiotic. Although Zephyr received the majority of her dosages, she did not respond to the second course of treatment and her condition worsened.

- On November 27, 2007, euthanasia was recommended by the shelter veterinarian because Zephyr was not responding to treatment. The volunteer who had a "hold" on Zephyr visited her that day and must have realized she was very ill. However, the volunteer did not remove Zephyr for further treatment. Animals that are on "hold" status pose a dilemma for staff; they struggle between euthanizing an animal versus holding on in the hopes that a volunteer or rescue group will meet their commitment to take the animal. Even when an animal on "hold" is euthanized for humane reasons, staff is often criticized even if it is in the animal's best interests. In this instance, staff erred on the side of trying to accommodate the volunteer's wishes.
- On December 1, 2007, Zephyr passed away. Zephyr had been in the Carson Animal Shelter for five weeks and on "hold" for the volunteer for a month.

Immediately, an erroneous charge was circulated through email that Zephyr had frozen to death. The charge was false, but unduly alarmed a number of well meaning people. An independent necropsy showed that Zephyr actually died from an upper respiratory infection complicated by a pre-existing condition known as Dilative Cardiomyopathy, or an enlarged heart. The Carson Animal Shelter's heating system is operational and was so at the time. In addition, the temperature the night that Zephyr died was in the low 50's, well above freezing, and Zephyr had a blanket in her kennel. No dogs have frozen to death at the Carson Animal Shelter.

CORRECTIVE ACTION PLAN

A review of Zephyr's case identified a number of process improvements that have been implemented to address the issues that came to light. These include:

- **Enforcing the "Hold" Policy**

The Department works with over 100 Adoption Partner groups that adopt animals from the County with the intent of then placing the animals into permanent homes. The County deeply values the many contributions made by these groups and works toward maintaining harmonious relationships with them. The Department has a full-time staff member in the Administrative Office to oversee this program, and shelter staff work directly with Adoption Partners on a daily basis.

One of the challenges faced by the Department in its efforts to work with volunteers or Adoption Partners is ensuring that the animals these partners place on "hold" are removed by them in a timely manner. This is critical because animal shelters cannot become a place to keep animals for extended periods of time. Animals that are housed too long at a shelter become stressed, are exposed to illnesses from other animals, infect animals with their own illnesses, and take up valuable cage space needed for new arrivals. Moreover, overcrowded shelters exceed staff's capacity to effectively and humanely care for the animals.

As part of the Department's review of the holding practices used by Adoption Partners and volunteers, it was discovered that the Carson Animal Shelter in particular had a large number of animals being held for a very extended periods of time. In fact, over 50 dogs were being held by volunteers or rescue groups, some for as long as five months. The Department has corrected this abuse of the system by insisting the animals be removed in a timely manner.

We have also reviewed the "hold" practice with shelter managers and their staff to ensure they are maintaining their animal populations at a reasonable number to protect the health and safety of the animals. The Department permits its managers to use their good judgment in evaluating how long an animal can stay in the shelters. The factors that are considered include the animal's health, the health of other animals in the shelter, and the cage space available. While the time an animal may be on hold can be flexible, in most cases we expect it to be removed within several days.

- **Medical Program**

The Department has reviewed its medication practices and has implemented several process improvements regarding this matter. Medication records are now kept with the Registered Veterinary Technicians (RVTs), where they are more easily accessible to medical staff and ensure more consistent distribution of medications. Prior to this, medical records were kept on the animals' cages, from where they were sometimes removed and no longer available to the medical staff.

The Department has also reviewed the vaccination practices at the shelter to ensure to the greatest extent possible that all animals are vaccinated upon impound. This is a best practice model and since the temporary staffing shortage ended the Department has been able to meet this goal.

- **Staffing**

The Carson Animal Shelter is allocated two RVTs and one veterinarian with oversight by the Department's Supervising Veterinarian. For several months during late 2007 both of the Shelter's RVT positions were vacant. Although RVTs from other shelters were temporarily reassigned to work at the Carson Animal Shelter, this staffing shortage did result in some animals not receiving their vaccinations immediately upon impound and on one reported occasion, a dog not ingesting all its pills. Since that time, the Department has filled both vacant RVT positions and has medical staff on duty seven days a week. The Department has also begun to purchase an antibiotic that is only required to be administered once daily, which places less demand on staff time.

The Chief Executive Officer's (CEO) Compensation Policy Division initiated an organizational study of the core job series in the Department in October, 2007. The core job series organizational study includes a review of the class specifications and related salary levels for all line level jobs in the Department. It is estimated that the study will be completed and forwarded to the CEO for his review and action in late February/early March. In addition, the Department will review staffing levels with the CEO as a part the Fiscal Year (FY) 2008-09 Proposed Budget.

FACILITY IMPROVEMENTS

The December 18, 2007 direction also requested a report regarding all necessary facility improvements at the Carson Animal Shelter, including the condition of the current heating system, washer and dryer, and blankets. The Internal Services Department (ISD) conducted a facility review and has made the following findings:

- **HVAC System**

The heating system at the Carson Animal Shelter is, and always has been, operational. Tests conducted by ISD show that the forced air temperatures in the kennels average 70 degrees Fahrenheit. In addition, the kennels have hot water pipes that pass beneath the kennel runs, which heat the concrete floors to an average of 74.5 degrees Fahrenheit. Although the heating system is operational, ISD is recommending a thorough maintenance of the system's air handlers for the three dog kennels and the one cat kennel, at a cost of \$35,000. The Department has ordered this service.

- **Industrial Washer and Dryers**

The Department has purchased new industrial washer and dryers for all County animal shelters. The industrial equipment will allow shelter staff and volunteers to more efficiently handle the volume of laundry generated at the shelters. Until these machines are installed, the Department is using a laundry service to ensure the animals have a steady source of clean blankets. There have been incorrect reports that the Carson Animal Shelter allowed donated blankets to become wet by leaving them outside during a rainstorm. In fact, those blankets were dirty ones waiting to be laundered.

- **Roofing**

As part of its review, ISD has also recommended replacing the roofs on all the Carson Animal Shelter buildings. The total cost for roof replacement is \$153,000 and will be funded with salary savings in the Department's FY 2007-08 Budget.

- **Walk-In Freezer**

The modular freezer at this Shelter needs to be replaced soon. Although it is operational now, there is concern that because of its age that it will become problematic during the summer months. The cost for this freezer, which stores the bodies of deceased animals prior to collection by the rendering service, will be absorbed into the cost of the rendering service contract. The Department has begun the process to replace this freezer now.

- **Refurbishment of Kennel Runs**

The Department recommends resurfacing of the kennel walls with epoxy coating, as well as replacement or refurbishment of the kennel cage fencing. This refurbishment will provide greater protection against disease since the surfaces will be easier to disinfect. The cost for this work, as verified by ISD is approximately \$100,000 per kennel building; the total cost for this work at the Carson Animal Shelter is approximately \$300,000. The Department will fund \$100,000 to refurbish one building immediately, and will ask for funding for the remaining two buildings in its FY 2008-09 budget request.

- **New Medical Facilities**

On the recommendation of the CEO, your Board on September 25, 2007, as a part of FY 2007-08 Supplemental Changes, approved the allocation of \$5 million for capital improvements at three of its six animal shelters. Specifically, this money has been designated to install new medical treatment and surgery wards at the Carson, Baldwin Park, and Lancaster Animal Shelters. This will greatly improve the infrastructure to provide the best care possible for the animals at these shelters. Programming for the new clinic buildings has been initiated and programming documents will be completed in March. Final design documents should be completed in the summer, and construction of all three clinics is estimated to be complete by the end of 2009 or the beginning of 2010.

- **Hot Water Heaters**

ISD recommends that one of the two hot water heaters that supply hot water to the grooming facility be replaced immediately. The cost for the new industrial water heater is \$10,000 and it is being ordered.

CONCLUSION

The total cost of these recommended refurbishments at the Carson Animal Shelter is \$313,000. The attachment is a spreadsheet summarizing this information. Following your Board's approval, the recommended refurbishments will be funded by utilizing the Department's current year savings. The appropriation adjustment is included in the CEO's mid-year budget adjustment Board letter that will be on the February 19, 2008 Board Agenda.

Each Supervisor
February 8, 2008
Page 6

The Internal Services Department also performing a maintenance review of the County's other animal shelters which will be completed by the end of February. The findings of this review will be shared with your Board in order that maintenance needs at these shelters may also be considered as a part of the FY 2008-09 Budget.

If you have any questions regarding this report, please contact Lari Sheehan, Deputy Chief Executive Officer at (213) 893-2477, or via e-mail at lsheehan@ceo.lacounty.gov or Marcia Mayeda at (562) 728-4610, or via e-mail at mmayeda@animalcare.lacounty.gov.

WTF:MM
LS:os

Attachment (1)

c: Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors
County Counsel

DEPARTMENT OF ANIMAL CARE AND CONTROL

Marcia Mayeda, Director

Cost	FY 2007-08 Emergency Repairs	Next Scheduled Repair
15,000	replace dead animal freezer at Carson - costs will be built into FY 2008-13 contract	
153,000	replace leaking kennel and barn roofs at Carson	
35,000	service the air handlers that move heat through the kennels at Carson	
100,000	repair dog kennels (epoxy walls and replace fencing) at Carson	repair remaining kennels FY 2008-09, 2009-10
10,000	replace one of two very old water heaters in the grooming building at Carson	other water heater to be replaced in FY 2008-09
313,000	TOTAL	